

Connecticut Cruise Ship Task Force:

Testimony of: George A. Cassidy. Executive Director

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Raised Bill No. 6317 (LCO No. 3017) *03017_____CE_*

AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE CONNECTICUT CRUISE SHIP TASK FORCE.



We, the Connecticut Cruise Ship Task Force, have been bringing cruise ships into the State of Connecticut since 2002 - using very little funding to do this. We began with a small passenger liner, *ms Regal Empress* that carried a little over four hundred passengers. Since that time we have brought in ships with over 3,000 passengers and 1,800 crew.

2007 saw seven cruise ship visits including four calls made by the *m/s Explorer of the Seas* which in of itself carried in excess of 3,000 passengers each visit. In 2008, Connecticut hosted more ship visits (08) but saw fewer total passengers due to the smaller size of the cruise ships that called on New London compared to 2007. In 2004, CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association - of which I am a member), stated that a cruise ship passenger spends approximately \$54.00 per port-call in any port they visit. I was told by the master of Holland America Line's *ms Veendam* that they estimate the expenditure to be \$150.00 per passenger in each port. If we look at the number of cruise ship passengers that visited Connecticut's Port of New London it is safe to say that \$1 to \$3 million were spent in southeastern Connecticut in 2007 and another \$1 to \$2.5 million were spent in 2008 during the port-calls here.

We had no port-calls in 2009. None were scheduled in 2010, but in December 2009, while closely working with the cruise lines *and their agents*, two visits were realized with Princess Cruises in September and October - port calls that saw in over 6,000 passengers visiting the our State.

A proposed change to the Jones Act and a rise in fuel costs to the cruise lines caused some negativity in cruise ships calling here in the past several years. That coupled to a very intense push by the Canadians lured cruise lines away from not only Connecticut but from other East Coast ports as well. Another factor was the reduction and near elimination of State financial support given to our organization.

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We have received financial support from the State and the City of New London to defray the cost of one part-time paid executive director and 35 volunteer staff and to promote Connecticut's Port of New London. Until recently, New London provided a \$15,000.00 annual grant to assist meeting our operating expenses. In 2007, CSTF received a \$15,000.00 matching grant from the now defunct Mystic Coast & Country. The match enabled us to obtain the first half of a grant of \$15,000.00 from the State's Commission of Culture and Tourism. The second half of that grant was released only after Logistec USA, Inc. (the operator of State Pier for the State of Connecticut) provided a donation of approximately \$17,000.00 to us. In 2008, a \$75,000 grant was provided to us by the Office of Policy and Management to assist with general operating costs. That same year, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) provided us with a \$52,000 grant earmarked to be used *only* for the rental of motor coaches to shuttle cruise ship passengers from the State Pier to downtown New London and to pay the rental costs of Union Station during the various port calls. Union Station acted as a cruise ship welcoming center for passengers and was staffed by volunteers during all port-calls. Recently we were advised by New London and various state officials that future funding should not be expected due to present "economic conditions". The uncertainty of supporting funds creates great instability in promoting Connecticut's Port of New London with current cruise ship recruitment.

Two months ago the head of Maine's cruise operations, Amy Powers, Director, CruiseMaineUSA, told me, *"that the Canadian's are investing hundreds of millions annually to build ports in the middle of nowhere and then they give the industry concessions to visit. It's really hard...I do understand. The main thing is to keep visiting the industry and telling them how much you want the business. That's all you can do with no money and even that is expensive."*

We do have a port facility and currently we are financially unable to give any concessions to the cruise lines at all. I did make a request to lower our current Head Tax and Docking Fees but was told that it was not possible at this time. We have had many requests from ship captains to have the dolphins on the northeast side of State Pier removed to enable better safer docking for their ships. This has not been done as there is no state funding currently available to do this. We are running our organization on "fumes" – but we are still running.

Speaking with, Thomas Spina, Executive Director of Cruise Operations for New York City recently, he related, *"I think we are in a situation where ports-of-call along the northeast are battling for calls. I can only suggest that the Symposium is a great opportunity to meet with the decision makers and get face to face time with the itinerary planners for each line. We are definitely expecting high level executives for the NYC Symposium just due to its ease of getting here, so, as I said, this is a great opportunity."*

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We are planning on attending the Canada/New England Cruise Symposium in New York City this coming June – this is where the actual working contacts with each cruise line that call in Canada/ New England attend.

We have the experience, we have the contacts, we have the port, we have the major attractions, we have the staff and we have the interest - we just do not have the funding to continue, and that's where the State of Connecticut can assist. Strong support from the State of Connecticut sends a very important message to the cruise lines.

"Don't Give Up the Ships!"

George A. Cassidy
Executive Director
The Connecticut Cruise Ship Task Force

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